Robin

Once there was a teenage girl named Robin. She lived with her parents in a two-story house outside of town; they were lower middle class but did not normally dwell on the things they wanted. Robin was tall and strong, good at sports and clever in her classes; everyone who met her wanted to bask in her light. One day Robin’s mother was carrying a basket of laundry down the stairs when she tripped and fell over her own feet. Robin rushed to her mother’s side as her father called for an ambulance. Robin clutched her mother’s hand and stroked her fingers through her hair, insisting that everything would be all right, even as her instincts told her that the ambulance wouldn’t make it in time.

Tears streamed down Robin’s face and in desperation she cried, “Please, give me the power to save her! Give me the power to save my mother!”

Much to Robin’s surprise a voice answered her, “Certainly.”

Robin turned and saw a man dressed entirely in white sitting at the top of the stairs. He had a kind face and his eyes were old and filled with wisdom.

“What is the cost?” Robin asked suspiciously.

“No cost,” said the man, “I shall give you the power to save people, and ask nothing in return.”

Robin nodded hesitantly and the man walked down the stairs and took her hand.

“The power to save people,” he breathed.

Robin felt a rush of warmth flow into her palm, as though she was holding fire without being burned, and carefully placed her hand against her mother’s cheek. The warmth expanded, then a small portion of it flowed into her mother. Her mother gasped and opened her eyes, and Robin collapsed against her crying. She looked up to thank the mysterious man, but he was gone.

News of the miracle spread throughout the town like wildfire, a girl whose touch had saved a life, and healed all the injuries. Barely a day after Robin had saved her mother, a young woman came to the house, carrying an infant. The baby’s cheeks were red with fever, and it was clearly very ill.

When Robin opened the door the woman said, “Oh, please heal my baby. The doctors say there isn’t any hope. I heard about what you did for your mother…”

Robin was more than willing to help, and placed her hand on the baby’s head. The heat flared in her palm again and a small piece was drained away. The fever faded from the baby’s cheeks and it made a happy gurgling noise. The mother thanked Robin through tears and went home to tell her husband of the amazing news.

The next day three people showed up at the house asking to be healed; Robin happily obliged. And so on it went, day after day, people would come begging for healing and Robin would heal them. After the first week Robin’s mother and father would always answer the door and wouldn’t allow her to go outside. Robin thought this was odd, but what bothered her more were the expressions on the peoples’ faces. They still seemed grateful, but it was strained. By the end of the second week Robin was allowed to open the door again, but the expressions had worsened, and Robin’s parents were always out somewhere, though when they did return home they were wearing new clothes and driving different cars.

In the middle of the third week after receiving her power, Robin’s normally strong frame seemed gaunt and her hair and eyes were dull. She felt sicker with every day that passed, but couldn’t make herself better. By the end of the month, Robin decided it was best to stop healing people, so she wouldn’t get them sick too. At this point there was an almost constant line of people leading to her door.

She walked outside and announced, “I’m sorry, but I cannot heal anyone else today. I’m feeling terrible and don’t want to get all of you sick.”

The people immediately cried in outrage. They screamed at her for being selfish and self-centered. They cried that their child was very sick, or their daughter’s wedding was soon and the doctors said they wouldn’t last that long. Their anger built and built until it snapped and the crowd rushed at Robin. They pushed her to the ground and clawed her skin and hair, and each grabbed her hand and healed themselves or their loved one. When everyone was healed they wandered away, muttering about how selfish Robin was. But Robin remained lying on the ground, with scratches, bruises, and clumps of hair pulled out. She relived the horror of having the warmth stripped from her hand with every person whom she was force to heal. No matter how she had tried to hold onto the heat, it was ripped roughly away.

Eventually her mother came home, dressed like she had been at a fancy restaurant in the city.

When she came upon Robin on the ground she scoffed, “Stupid girl, why didn’t you just heal the people? They paid good money for it.”

“What?” Robin croaked.

“5000 dollars per healing, how else do you think I could afford this?” her mother asked, gesturing to the diamond ring that adorned her finger.

“You were charging people?” Robin asked in outrage.

Her mother laughed, “Of course. Why waste such a talent. Your father and I finally saw a way to move up in the world and we took it. But now you’ve gone and got yourself injured, can’t you just heal yourself?”

Robin shook her head.

“Pity, I guess I’ll have to pay for you to see a doctor after all.”

Robin’s mother took her to the hospital and put her in a private room.

“Heal fast girl,” her mother said, “I don’t want to pay for you to just lie around in bed all day. You do enough of that at home.”

Robin was very sick. Her eyes were sunken, and there were deep shadows beneath them. Her hair hung limp and greasy, and her ribs were clearly visible. She rested in the hospital for two days, but showed no improvement; on the third day the doctor came to see her.

“Hello Robin,” he said, “How do you feel today?”

Robin shook her head and grimaced.

“That’s too bad. Listen,” he said softly, “I was just diagnosed with a brain cancer that will kill me in a couple of months. Surely you would heal me so I can continue to help patients?”

Tears welled in Robin’s eyes, “I’m so sorry,” she said, “but I can’t heal you.”

The doctor stared down at her, “You’re lying, you selfish girl. You can heal me; you just want to keep your gift to yourself!”

Robin shook her head frantically and desperately tried to explain that the more she healed people the worse she felt, but the doctor would not listen.

“Enough with your excuses!” he yelled, “I’m going to live!” and he reached out to grab her hand.

But just before he touched her, a blade appeared at his throat and cut a deep gash. He collapsed to the ground and his blood formed a gleaming puddle on the floor. Behind where he had been standing was the man in white. He casually threw the knife aside and walked to stand closer to Robin’s bed. Robin stared up at him.

“Fool,” he said softly as he took Robin’s hand.

The last of the warmth flowed from her hand to his, and he cupped both hands together, as though cradling the heat. A tiny orange flame appeared, and as Robin drew her last breath she watched the man close his hands. When he opened them a bird sat in his palm. He walked to the window and opened it.

The bird flew away.